VILLAGE EARTH APPROACH
to
GRASSROOTS EMPOWERMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, humanity faces numerous challenges that threaten our peaceful coexistence on this planet. As competition over the earth's remaining resources increases, more and more people are pushed to the margins of survival while power and wealth is increasingly concentrated. Despite the over 2.3 trillion dollars spent on aid over the last five decades, the situation has only worsened for the majority of the world's population as the gulf between the rich and the poor has consistently widened.

Traditionally, the dominant development institutions have defined the problem as "poverty" which they sought to fix through a system of international aid directed at the so-called "third-world" but managed and funded by the rich countries. However, this system has done very little to solve the problems faced by the majority of the world's poor. Instead, it has largely served as a vehicle to advance the political and economic interests of donor countries. For recipient countries, it has often meant the loss of control over their natural and human resources, fueling an inherently unjust and unsustainable system where 20% percent of the global population consumes over 80% percent of the world's resources. According to the United Nations, "Under a business-as-usual scenario, 2 planets would be required by 2030 to support the world's population." It is abundantly clear that a new model of development is needed.

Village Earth was founded on the belief that poverty is not the problem, rather, it is merely a symptom of the larger problem of individuals and communities becoming disconnected from the resources that contribute to human well-being. We believe that the real challenge that we face as a global community is how everyone can have access to the resources needed to live well without compromising the ability of others and future generations from doing the same. Defining the problem in this way refocuses it away from the so-called "third-world" and recognizes the international connections between the consumption of resources, inequality and poverty. To overcome this challenge, Village Earth believes that as a global community we must place greater emphasis on sustainable development and the sharing of power and resources with marginalized populations. But also, we believe these two strategies must be interconnected to be truly effective and that we cannot rely on those who benefit from current system to lead the way forward. Rather, marginalized communities must be empowered to lead the way.

Inspired by the concept that all humanity lives in a single global community or village, the Village Earth approach was designed as more holistic, just and equitable model of development that recognizes the right of <u>ALL</u> people to be active participants in that global community. The Approach works by "assisting disadvantaged individuals and groups gain greater control than they presently have over local and national decision-making and resources, and of their ability and right to define collective goals, make decisions and learn from experience" (Edwards & Hulme, 1992, p. 24). In the spirit of Ghandi's philosophy of *swaraj*, Village Earth is focused on enhancing the control and management that marginalized communities have over their resources. Doing so not only contributes to their well-being but also increases their capacity for self-determination. This is especially relevant for indigenous communities whose culture is often intimately intertwined with their environment and who define progress, oftentimes, very different from Western market-oriented societies.

The Village Earth approach is a bottom-up approach to community empowerment. Rather than carrying out projects directly, Village Earth serves a support structure that enables grassroots organizations to realize their own strategies and solutions. Traditionally, INGO's decided what projects they are going to do based on their funding and/or their expertise in a single sector. As a result, the supposed beneficiaries had very little say in the overall goals, reducing their participation to making minor modifications to predetermined strategies and objectives. The usual response by communities is one of passive compliance or *"sure you can install that well, latrine, irrigation ditch, etc. but we're not going to put much effort into helping because we have other, more pressing priorities."* When single-sector organizations do attempt to facilitate general community analysis and planning prior to initiating projects, communities often feel steered in the direction of the organizations priorities or expertise.

The Village Earth approach overcomes this dilemma by supporting local intermediate organization whose sole function is to facilitate community dialogue and planning in an open and non-directive way, honoring the intelligence and creativity of the community members. Once the community or

group has developed its own strategies and solutions, the support organization helps to connect them with the resources and expertise that help make it happen. In this way, the community gets the resources it needs, when it needs it. This approach also creates greater efficiency for outside resource institutions and single-sector organizations by creating community-driven demand for their resources vs. those resources being pushed upon disinterested communities.

BACKGROUND OF THE VILLAGE EARTH APPROACH

The roots of Village Earth reach back to 1961, when the late Dr. Maurice Albertson, Professor Emeritus of Civil Engineering at Colorado State University (CSU), worked with Sargeant Shriver to establish the U.S. Peace Corps. Dr. Albertson continued to be a major influence in the field of international development, serving as a consultant to the World Bank, USAID, UNESCO, and other agencies. In 1993, Dr. Albertson began a successful collaboration with Dr. Edwin and Miriam Shinn, who brought to the table more than 30 years working at the community-level in places as diverse as inner-city Chicago, tribal communities in India, the Outback of Australia, and the Horn of Africa. All three shared their concern over the poor effectiveness of overseas development assistance and organized an International Conference on Sustainable Village Development at CSU that same year. More than 300 participants from 30 nations came together to create the Consortium for Sustainable Village-Based Development (CSVBD) and gave it the mandate to implement and train others in the strategies discussed during the conference. CSVBD was officially incorporated as a U.S. Federally recognized 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization in 1995 and later renamed Village Earth, and its CSU training arm the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) was also established. Since its inception Village Earth and IISD have trained and consulted with hundreds of individuals and organizations all over the world. The Mission of Village Earth is to support the empowerment of marginalized populations around the world by strengthening intermediate and grassroots organizations.

VISION

Our vision is to build and international network of organizations, funding agencies, academics, and technical experts with the goal of transforming the traditional top-down aid system. Village Earth is positioning itself as a hub for peer-learning and peer-support for intermediate and grassroots organizations operating around the world, functioning as both a support structure for emerging projects and a communication hub for its allied organizations. Already, our training programs are enriched by these discussions and bottom-up learning from allied GSOs, but also by drawing the members to serve as participants, hosts and faculty for training programs and webinars around the world.

STRUCTURE OF VILLAGE EARTH

The central actor in the Village Earth approach is a particular type of intermediate organization that focuses on supporting grassroots initiatives from the bottom-up called a Grassroots Support Organization (GSO). Rather than being dictated by the priorities, time-lines and methods of donors, GSO's form a long-term alliances with a particular region and are committed to its long-term empowerment. In a 2008 article in the Journal of Community Practice, GSO's were described this way:

> "A subset of NGOs has decided to move beyond social service provision and invest in initiatives that build the human and financial resources of impoverished communities. Focusing on diverse issues—from health and the environment to political mobilization and microenterprises—these NGOs share a common approach to the communities with which they work: They foster the long-term empowerment of impoverished populations by assisting them in decision making and the mobilization of resources and political power. This core approach is what defines these development NGOs as grassroots support

organizations."

In the Village Earth Approach one GSO can support several grassroots community-driven initiatives and organizations across an entire region. In this way, we support the development of two levels of social organization, regional AND at the grassroots community level. GSO's provide temporary organizational support, fiscal sponsorship, funding, networking, advocacy, and training to these grassroots organizations so they can access the resources they need to develop and refine their strategies, giving them the time to develop organically rather than being rushed simply to meet the demands of donors. Where one GSO can serve as a support hub for numerous formal and informal grassroots organizations, Village Earth serves as an international hub for a multiple GSO's around the world, providing access to international donors through our fiscal sponsorship based in the United States and Europe, organizational support, training, networking, and advocacy support services. (see our three-tiered organizational model below).
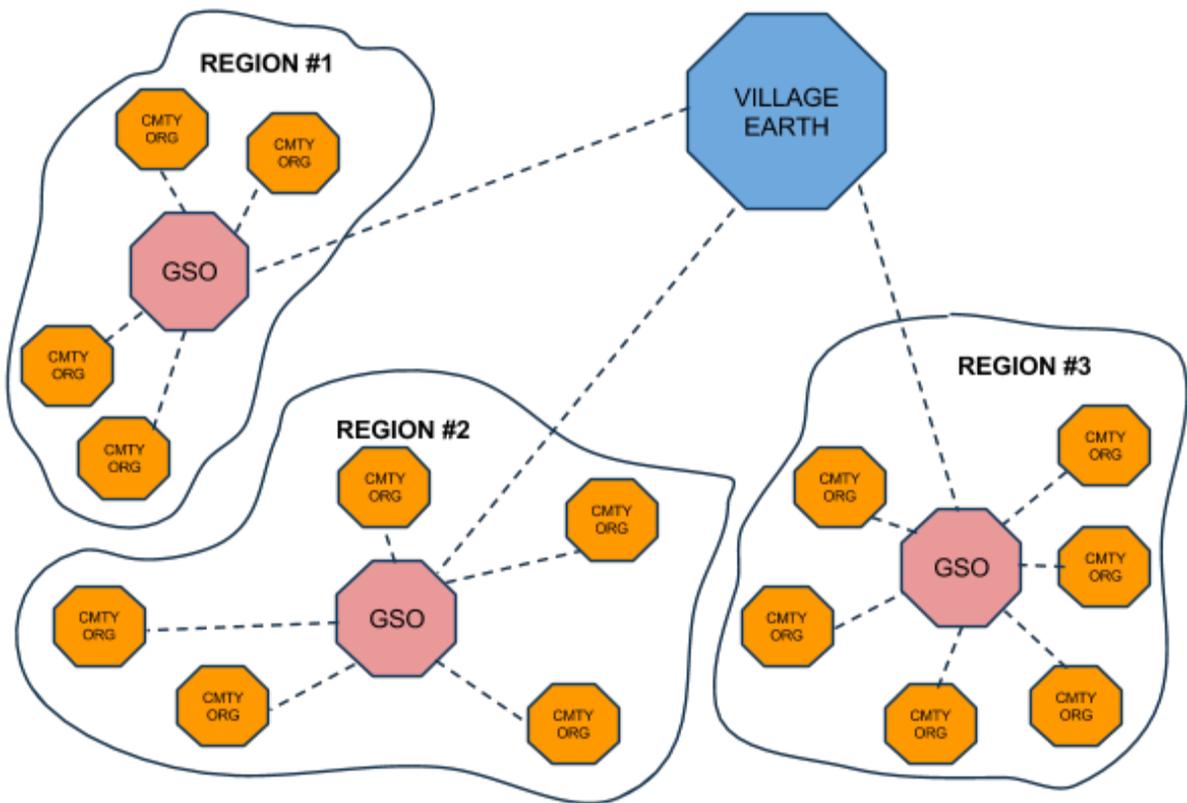

Figure 1: Village Earth's decentralized organizational structure. Village Earth in the center serving as a support hub for several semi-autonomous GSO's each working with several communities within a particular region around the globe.

	Village Earth	**Grassroots Support Organization (GSO)**	**Grassroots Community Organization**
Organization	A registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization basted at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado.	Usually registered as a non-governmental organization in the country and region where it based.	May be registered as a non-governmental or private entity in the country or region where it operates but often-times is an informal group or association.
Area of Focus	Provides support services to multiple GSO's around the world.	Supports multiple grassroots community organizations across a specific region.	May support their community generally or a specific segment of the community who share a common need or issue.
Composition	Comprised of an international staff with expertise needed to support allied GSOs.	Comprised of individuals with expertise in community facilitation, mobilization, and organizing. GSO Staff do not directly benefit from the services provided by the GSO or from the grassroots community organizations it supports.	Comprised of individuals who directly or indirecetly benefit from the organization (e.g. farmers cooperative, water users' association, artisan groups, midwife's association, etc.)
Support Services	Provides international fiscal sponsorship, training, networking, research, marketing, and advocacy support services to GSO's. ⇨	Provides facilitation, training, research, networking, fiscal sponsorship, and advocacy support services to formal and informal community organizations. ⇒	Services designed to address a specific community-identified need or issue.

Table 1: Descriptions of the three tiers of the Village Earth Organization Chart

VILLAGE EARTH'S SUPPORT SERVICES

Village Earth has developed a number of services that it provides to Grassroots Support Organizations around the world. While we try not to limit the type of services we provide so as to be responsive and adaptive to the needs of GSO's. We have found the following services to be the most appropriate and relevant at this time.

Training and Consultation

Village Earth currently offers a two-week training in its approach to Grassroots Support Organizing called "Participatory Practices for Sustainable Development" (PPSD). It also has developed a 16 online "short-courses" focused on various sectors of grassroots support. Organizations and groups that seek to partner with Village Earth must complete the two-week PPSD training before a more formal partnership agreement is signed. We also provide customized, on-demand training for our partner GSO's or for other organizations that can utilize our expertise.

Fiscal Sponsorship

A fundamental challenge faced by many grassroots organizing efforts is to balance the inherent tensions that arise as a group begins to grow. On the one hand, soliciting donations, grants, business sponsorships, and generally transacting business may be facilitated by greater structural capacity, such as legal incorporation, standardized and transparent accounting practices, and stable and reliable leadership. On the other hand, formalizing structures, practices, and procedures too quickly can actually compromise the key features of what makes many grassroots groups successful in the first place, namely their broad approach to issues and interventions, flexibility and adaptability to change, dispersed leadership, and sense of group solidarity.

The best approach to mitigate some of these tensions is to make gradual steps to formalizing and move at a pace where the group feels comfortable at and each step. One intermediate step from being an informal community group to being a full fledge incorporated organization is to find a pre-existing non-profit organization to serve as a fiscal sponsor. A fiscal sponsorship is a relationship between a pre-existing non-profit organization and one that is not (the sponsored project). Fiscal sponsorship allows the sponsored project to solicit grants and donations through the sponsoring organization, usually for a nominal fee. Since the sponsoring organization becomes legally liable for the use of funds by the sponsored project, they usually create certain conditions that the sponsored project must comply with to ensure the continuation of their sponsorship. (see Village Earth's Decentralized Funding Model below for a discussion on how Village Earth overcomes the tensions between accountability vs. being responsive to the grassroots.)

Marketing and Fundraising Support

Another challenge that many emerging grassroots and grassroots support organizations face is building media presence and a network of supporters. Village Earth can help grassroots and grassroots support organizations develop easy to manage websites, videos, brochures and other media necessary to build a network of supporters (whether they be donors, political allies, technical experts, or community members). We believe building sustainability is about creating a large network of individuals and institutions. To help manage this we also offer a premiere cloud-based relationship management service, accessible anywhere in the world. We also promote partner project through social media, direct mail, website, blogs, and print newsletter.

Facilitation and Networking

Upon request, Village Earth can provide various facilitation and network services for its GSO partners or with the communities it supports. This can include facilitating workshops, mediation support, or networking with stakeholders, technical experts, or funders.

Praxis-based Advocacy

Praxis-based advocacy is a form of activism that is based on the everyday lives of the grassroots. Rather than being based solely on a left or right ideology, this type of advocacy seeks to be directly relevant to the material lives of the disadvantaged, while simultaneously addressing broader systemic issues that reproduce structures of inequality and oppression. (Not sure how to word this, because both ideologies think they are directly applicable too.) This is not to say that praxis-based advocacy has no ideology or that the critiques it produces will radically differ from some ideological arguments, but rather that it is guided by the concrete and real experiences of communities in the context of larger systemic challenges. As opposed to solidarity work, which often seeks to amplify specific sectors of a community (say the left) against broad global policies, the praxis-based approach to advocacy attempts to advocate in regards to specific material barriers to access faced by much of the community (regardless of the community members' ideology), by articulating their relation to broader policy topics.

VILLAGE EARTH'S DECENTRALIZED FUNDING MODEL

In the traditional aid system funding flows from top-to-bottom. Often mirroring that flow is decision-making and power. According to Powers (2002) "While there are often attempts to build a more holistic partnership, once funds are introduced the relationship becomes one of power held by the INGO with the community often forced to respond 'appropriately' to INGO's real or perceived wishes in order to secure the elusive funds". A common dilemma that occurs with the traditional funding model is the competition that is created between the NGO and communities over funds. For example with a well project, since the Community oftentimes doesn't know how much is budgeted for the project, they will seek to get the best well they can get. The NGO, on the other hand seeks to economize and get just the quality of well that will do the job since any funds remaining can either be used to purchase more wells or be used to cover other aspects of the project, like salaries for its personnel. The Village Earth decentralized funding model eliminates the built-in competition between outside organizations! Here's how it works. Rather than funding and decision-making flowing from the top-down, In the Village Earth decentralized model, each level of organization is ultimately responsible for it's own survival and for generating its own funding, but with support and training from the level above it. In exchange for these services, the level above retains a small percentage of any funding generated through the partnership. All levels are also provided support and training to develop income generating programs, eventually eliminating the need for outside funding. For example, the GSO can work with grassroots to create income generating services to meet locally determined needs, such as micro-finance services, training, organizing farmers' or artisans' markets, supporting a marketing cooperative, computer and telecommunications, etc.

This is a radical departure from the traditional system. Instead of grassroots organizations being dependent on the NGO, the NGO is now dependent on the grassroots and Village Earth is dependent on the GSO's, creating a monetary incentive for providing relevant and timely support services that benefit the grassroots. It also creates an incentive for grassroots organizations to increase their capacity and become formalized so they can retain the overhead paid to the GSO and for the GSO to longer need the support from Village Earth.

At this point, you may be asking, "How can we expect grassroots organizations to have the mechanisms for accountability in-place for this financial system to work?" Our solution to this dilemma is the creation of restricted project accounts. Each GSO creates a separate project account for each grassroots organization it is allied with. In order to create a project account, the grassroots organization must define its process for making decisions and identify the "trigger" (e.g. Quorum, approval by elder, head man, or head woman, etc.) so the GSO knows when the group has agreed to transfer a specific amount of funds to the group or make a direct purchase on behalf of the organization. Any funds generated through the partnership, through direct donor appeals, grants, contracts, etc. are deposited into the group's restricted account with the "overhead" percentage taken off the top and transferred to the GSO's "General Fund." Grassroots organizations can use the funds in any way they choose as long as it fits within the parameters they stated in their mission and following the decision-making protocol they outlined. At any time, the grassroots organization can request a statement of income and expenses to ensure proper management of their accounts. The competition between NGO's and communities that is inherent in the traditional funding system is also eliminated. Since funds in their account do not expire (unless otherwise specified as part of a special grant or contract) grassroots organizations have an an incentive to economize as much as possible since any money they save can be utilized on future projects. Of course, all of this written up into a basic mutual agreement created between the different grassroots group and the GSO and between the different GSO's and Village Earth.

An example of how this model is working can be found on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, USA. The Pine Ridge with an indigenous population of approximately 28,000 people encompassing an area of 60 by 90 miles in Southwest South Dakota. Across the Reservation, Village Earth is allied with the Lakota Lands Recovery Project (LLRP), a GSO which in-turn, is allied with numerous formal and informal grassroots projects across the reservation including the Lakota Buffalo Caretakers Cooperative, The Wounded Knee Tiyospaye Project, the Knife Chief Buffalo Nation, The Buffalo Hump Sanctuary, Wakanyeja Pawiciyapi, the Red Shirt Community

Gardening Project, Black Feather Buffalo Ranch. For each grassroots project, the LLRP has created it's own restricted fund. This gives these groups the ability to raise funds from individuals, write grants, and secure contracts. All of these groups are more than willing to pay the LLRP 15% for this fiscal sponsorship service as well as all the other services we are providing them.

Just as the GSO's are dependent on the income generated by providing support services to grassroots organizations, Village Earth is dependent on the income it generates by providing support services to GSO's. While GSO's are encouraged and trained in ways to generate resources domestically, creating greater local-self reliance, their partnership with Village Earth also enables them to branch out to an international audience for funding and support. Through our international network of donors, our website, newsletter, and U.S. and European-based fiscal sponsorship capability, we become a conduit for resources from rich countries to flow directly to grassroots community-driven initiatives around the world! Village Earth sustainability also comes from training and consulting with organizations worldwide wishing to adopt our innovative approach to grassroots support.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE GRASSROOTS

To ensure ongoing accountability to the grassroots, Village Earth's allied GSOs all adhere to the following core principles.

- **They Make a Long-term Personal Commitment to Communities.**While GSO staff are generally comprised of people from the same region or country as the communities they are supporting, they are generally not embedded in the local social networks. However, when allied with local grassroots leadership and organizations, they have a unique ability to bridge within and between these local leaders, social groups and resource institutions, forming Grassroots Support Network (GSN), where a local alone might not be able to. We believe the only way to build sufficient trust and a genuine sense of solidarity and mutual accountability with communities is when they can count on the GSO being there for the long-term. Genuine empowerment requires diligence in several areas in order to be successful. It demands a commitment to creating an enabling environment where the tools for self reliance are fostered (Korten 1984; Mansuri and Rao 2003). A people based development agency must be prepared for longer time commitments on projects in order to facilitate the bottom up, organic growth of community driven projects (Mansuri and Rao 2003). The importance of commitment to the project outside of timelines is echoed by Korten (1991) due to the need for place and context specific responses to individual communities. Furthermore, transforming deeply entrenched structures of power is a slow and gradual process (Trawick 2001). According to Mosse (1997b), "[i]f external agencies try to change the political and social dynamic without fully understanding it, the social equilibrium can be severely disrupted, with nothing to take its place."

- **They Work as Allies vs. Project Managers**This starts with a genuine willingness to listen and learn from the people within the communities they are allied with. To take the time necessary to develop relationships based on trust, solidarity and mutual accountability, they suspend any preconceived notions they may have about what is needed and instead create a space for the community to develop and/or share their vision for the future and the strategies that might move them towards it. In the spirit of [1] Paulo Freire, we believe that by working together as allies in praxis (an intentional cycle of planning, action, and reflection) communities can identify and eliminate the objective sources of their oppression.

[1]Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Penguin Education)*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2nd edition.

But also, we as outsiders can learn how our own relative privilege is intertwined in that oppression. In this way, empowerment is a mutual process. The genuineness and reciprocal nature of this relationship is the basis for developing genuine trust and solidarity at the grassroots.

- **They Focus on the Community's Long-term Vision vs. Band-aid Approaches that Just Address Symptoms.** Instead of focusing on "problems" Village Earth's GSO allies facilitates communities in developing a long-term holistic vision for their region. Unlike focusing on problems, a holistic vision allows communities to imagine the world they would like to live in. You can deal with problems forever, yet never deal with the underlying contradictions behind poverty and powerlessness. Identifying a vision first makes it possible to identify and prioritize exactly what it is that is preventing you and your community from creating a better situation. The visioning process becomes the starting point for the ongoing praxis process described in the previous point and also forms the baseline for future assessment, monitoring and evaluation where individuals and communities come together to reflect on the progress of their various strategies and whether they are moving them towards their vision. But we have also found that through praxis, the vision becomes clearer and more broadly shared. Starting with a community's vision also empowers communities to define progress on their own terms rather than having to adopt Western models and practices. This is why the Village Earth approach has been particularly successful with Indigenous communities who may define progress is ways that are very different from Western donors and NGOs. To help ensure long-term sustainability, our model calls for the creation of both a short term (5-10 years) as well as a long-term (seven generations) vision. In this way, communities can reflect upon the impact that their decisions today will have on future generations.

- **They Work Towards the Mobilization and Empowerment of Entire Regions or Social Groups.** In the spirit of Ghandi's concept of Swaraj, the recognition that true power comes from self-reliance and self-governance. And this being possible only with the mobilization of sufficient human and natural resources. In other words it takes more than just one or two villages to mobilize the critical mass and resources necessary to break the cycle of dependence behind much of the world's poverty. We do not argue that all communities and regions should become self-sufficient, but rather self-reliant in that they have the ability and freedom to choose their own strategies. By gradually linking communities, community leaders, grassroots organizations, foundations, government agencies, businesses forming a Grassroots Support Network, communities can break the cycle of dependence that compromises their self-determination. Furthermore, sustainability of our decentralized financial model requires that GSO's mobilize entire regions vs. one or two communities. As such, allied GSO's have a built-in incentive to increase impact without diminishing the quality of their support to communities. In the traditional aid system, because of the backward incentive structure and built-in competition between NGO's and communities, quality of services is often traded for impact and efficiency to please donors. Unfortunately, in this case, poor quality means disempowerment.

- **Organizational Structures Built on Trust, Solidarity, & Mutual Accountability.** We believe the only way to ensure genuine accountability to the communities we are working with is by creating and maintaining organizational structures built around trust, solidarity and mutual accountability. Within this framework the concern is not just with the final outcome, but with how the outcome is reached, and how the people within the framework contribute meaningfully to the organization (Davies 2000). The people become actors working to build the system, instead of being subjected to it. Key features of people based organizations are empowerment of members of the community (Davies 2000), decentralized decision making (Rothschild- Whitt 1979), context specific practices and policies, and an emphasis on the importance of trust between the employees of the development agency and the people with whom they are partnering (Korten 1984). While people based organizations are certainly still concerned about desired outcomes, the process by which the outcome is reached is organic and can be changed as needed. Such organizations are more responsive to the places in which they work and location specific needs, as opposed to being bound by the ways in which they work and trying to replicate generic processes. A central feature of such organizations is a bottom-up flow of decision

making (Mansuri and Rao 2003) which enables the organizations to foster participatory development within communities (Chambers 1983). Projects and needs are met on an individual basis, evaluated with the input of the community, and a unique process grows out of that input (Korten 1991).

PHASES OF THE VILLAGE EARTH APPROACH

While it would be inaccurate to describe the Village Earth approach as a linear model where one thing ends and another thing begins until you have moved through all the steps to empowerment. In fact, reality is often much messier than any model can truly capture. However, for the sake of communicating what the Village Earth Approach might look like over a given period of time, we have broken it down into a four phases which I will describe here.

PHASE I: PROJECT PREPARATION

The project preparation phase is the time before any formal projects have been initiated. It is a time when an individual or group can survey the land to determine the feasibility of developing a Grassroots Support Network (GSN) for the region. Some of the factors that might be used to assess feasibility might include:

- Political stability and safety of the region.
- Existing levels of self-mobilization of communities in the region.
- The potential for overlapping with with other organizations providing support services in the region.
- The existing leadership in the region and the level of interest and support they are willing to provide.
- The existing resources in the region and the potential for their mobilization.

The goal of Phase I is to determine whether this is the region to begin work but especially for the individuals or organization wanting to form a regional GSO to assess their level of interest and their ability commit to the region for at least 10 to 20 years. If that commitment is there, they can approach Village Earth about forming a partnership. Ideally, they would have completed initial training from Village Earth prior to initiating Phase I.

PHASE II: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Once the GSO members have made a personal commitment to the region, community mobilization can begin. Community mobilization is defined as an initial and ongoing process central to any community transformation that seeks to build the support and participation of individuals, groups and institutions to works towards a common goal or vision.

Community mobilization is the oxygen that when blown onto coals, spark into a flame. In community mobilization there is transformation that occurs within individuals and between individuals working as a group. At the individual level if people feel hopeless, ineffective, incapable, or incompetent, they will always wait for change to come from the outside. Just the opposite, when people are confident in their ideas, in their ability to create change they they look within themselves, not to outsiders, for the source of that change. At the group level, if individuals don't share a common vision and purpose then they will not be able to harness the power of collective effort and their vision for change will not gain the legitimacy and support from the broader community.

It is during the process of community mobilization where communities develop a vision for the future and build the relationships necessary to achieve it. If a community is not adequately mobilized, it is likely that attempts to generate technologies, by local leaders OR external organizations, will either be inconsistent with the priories of that community and/or fail to fit within a logical or narrative framework that makes sense to people in that community.

Successful community mobilization efforts do not simply draw upon these pre-existing understandings of the community and change, but rather challenges individuals and communities to critically analyze their reality in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection.

The goal of Phase II is to work with communities and groups to develop a holistic vision for the region and a few key strategies and actions to begin to move towards that vision. At this point, the role of the GSO shifts from being a facilitator of the visioning/planning process to providing networking support to help build the relationships to resources that will fuel their strategies and actions.

PHASE III: APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY GENERATION

Phase III Naturally builds on the strategies and actions that came out of Phase II activities. While the term "Appropriate Technology" might seem restricted to things like pumps, wells, latrines, houses, etc. We define "Appropriate Technology" as any culturally appropriate, environmentally sustainable and socially just means to an ends. While traditional technological solutions are certainly included in this definition it also includes social/organizational technologies. For example, if a community believes that lack of political participation is the biggest obstacle to their vision of empowerment, the appropriate technology that will get them there might be a political base-building campaign. Or if the obstacle in the way of their vision is the contamination of their rivers, then the appropriate technology might be an political advocacy or boycott campaign targeted at the offending corporation.

Technologies can be both "hard" technical (e.g. Wells, tractors, mills) and "soft" organizational (e.g. savings groups, barefoot doctors, community work days) but sustainable technologies usually are some combination of both – the irrigation scheme with well organized water user's association. We believe any technology must be appropriate for the unique social and cultural context where it is to be applied. Furthermore, technology must be developed in a way that doesn't create even more problems or inequities by creating unbearable debt burdens, eliminating people's jobs, or lessening the ability of future generations to access a resource. But to be sustainable, every technology must be "wrapped" in a social organization to ensure the equitable use, long-term maintenance, and problem solving needed to keep it working in an ever changing world. This mutual development of hard and soft technologies is what we call Technology Generation.

The goal of Phase III is to support the grassroots to develop appropriate technologies that help them move towards their vision. But also to facilitate ongoing reflection and analysis that makes it possible to clarify the vision, refine strategies, increase the impact actions.

PHASE IV: NETWORK EXTENSION

The final phase of the Village Earth approach is to expand the impact of Appropriate Technologies developed in Phase III across the region. For example, including more of the region in a get-out-the-vote campaign, or bringing more women into an artisans cooperative, or expanding the use of organic fertilizer developed by local farmers, the possibilities are limitless. The goal is really expanding regional the support network, enhancing both local self-reliance and self-determination. This phase can also be about building or enhancing national and international networks for political advocacy, access to markets, information, and expertise.

LOGIC MODEL FOR PHASES OF GRASSROOTS SUPPORT

PROJECT PREPARATION

GSO staff visit with communities in the region and has informal open-ended discussions with a diversity of community members to get a feel for how people define community, their vision for the future, social and political organization, identify formal and informal leadership, etc.

(GSO's seeking to allie with VE should complete this phase before being approved)

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Once GSO staff have a good feeling for how communities and the region are organized they should identify Basic Units of Action from which to start developing an initial vision, analyze the obstacles, identify strategies and specific actions that will begin to eliminate the obstacles, and move them towards their vision.

APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY GENERATION

Taking the strategies the community developed in the CM Phase, GSO should seek-out resources to support the emergent teams

(strategy will most likely involve supporting pre-existing initiatives w/ in communities)

Community-based action teams carry out strategies with ongoing support from GSO.

NETWORK EXTENSION

GSO continually works to mobilize more communities and groups in the region, creating collaborative alliances and consensus around the vision, strategies, and actions!

GSO should facilitate ongoing reflection around the effectiveness of its support, the strategies, and actions.

GSO should facilitate ongoing reflection around the effectiveness of how things are organized and bigger picture of "are we moving towards the vision?" Facilitating the clarification of the vision and obstacles and the revision of strategies and actions.
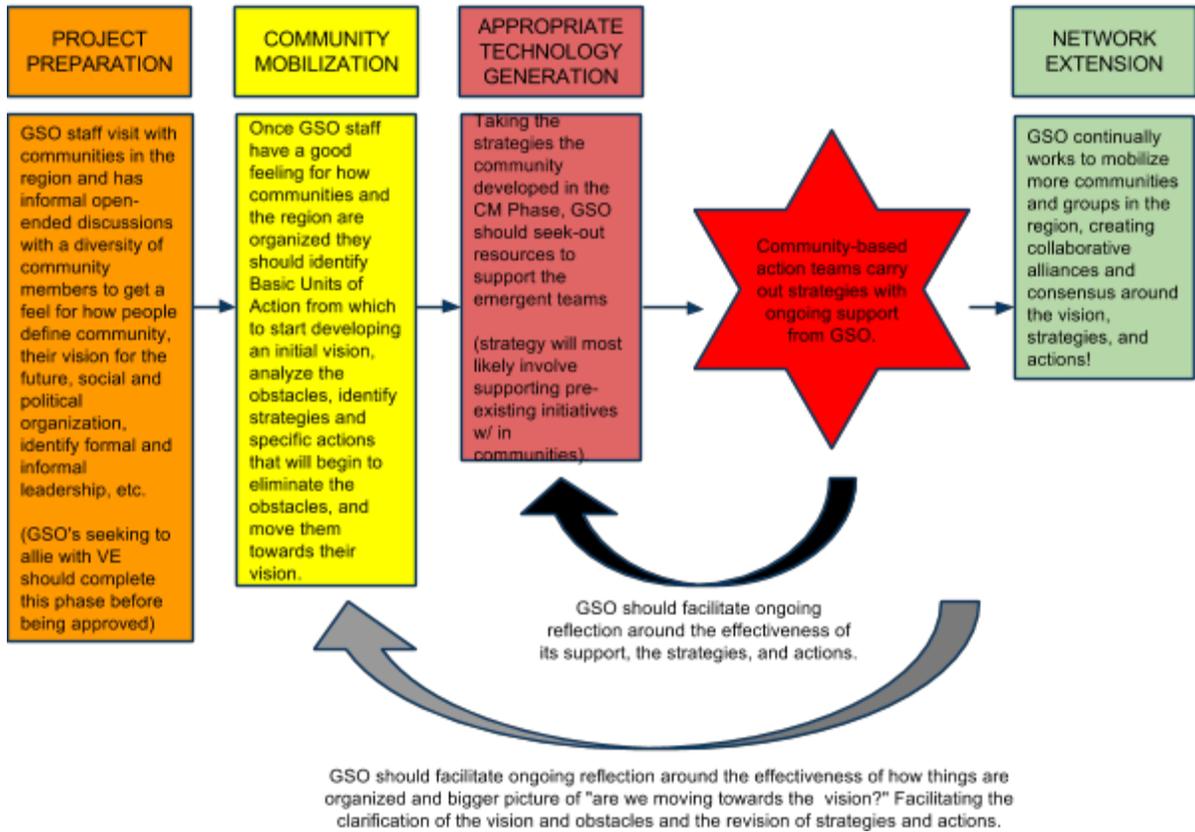
FIGURE 2: Logic Model For Phases of the Village Earth Grassroots Support Approach.
It should be emphasized that this is not a linear process, at any given time you might be doing activities that fit into each of these phases. It is also important to recognize the numerous feedback loops that exist within and between phases. For example, as successful appropriate technologies begin take shape people who may not have been interested in getting involved previously, might now be inspired to participate, further enhancing the mobilization and appropriate technology phases. Furthermore, at all phases, the GSO should be facilitating reflection and analysis to help build greater awareness and consciousness within the region that can help clarify the vision and refine the strategies and actions.

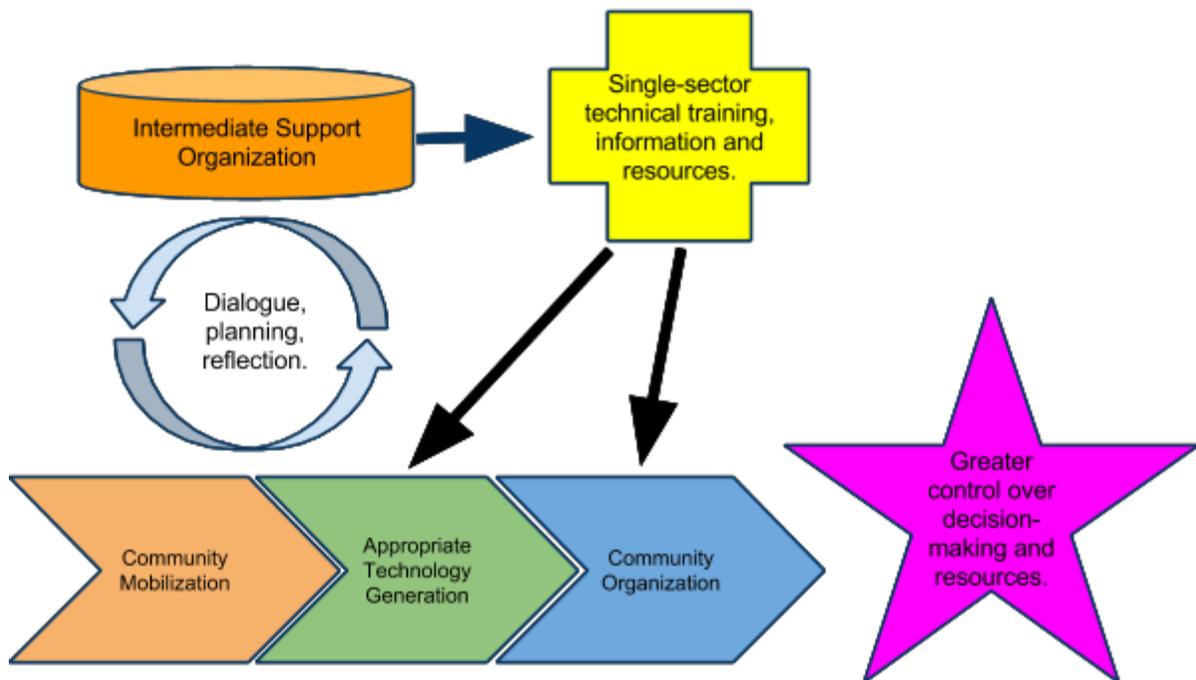## The Village Earth Approach to Supporting Grassroots Empowerment

FIGURE 3: Village Earth Approach ensures community planning is non-directive by bringing in single-sector organizations and outside funding only <u>AFTER</u> communities have had sufficient time to do their own analysis and planning.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: A VILLAGE EARTH APPROACH

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is an important part of building both accountability and a learning process into the development program from the beginning, both within and between communities and organizations. M&E should be incorporated into each phase of the community development process and included into implementation planning as a concrete plan for M&E drawn up by the community itself. M&E planning from the beginning can allow the funding strategy and ensuing M&E approach to spring from this relationship. Here we advocate for a Community Praxis Approach to lay the fundamentals of an M&E process.

A Theoretical Introduction to the Community Praxis Approach

The Community Praxis Approach stems from Paulo Freire's ideas on education and poverty, which have their roots in Marxist concepts of an "ideological superstructure" shaped by the mode of production (e.g. capitalism, colonialism) and which forms the fabric of the "social consciousness." According to Marx, this is a "false consciousness," preventing people from recognizing the true nature of their reality, and most importantly, the reality of their exploitation.

Freire was also influenced by the concept of praxis in Marxist theory –namely, the idea that theory should be grounded in action and the everyday practice of human beings. Freire explains,

> "It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot

be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection; only then will it be a praxis."

In practical terms, the oppressed must shape their understanding of reality by critically analyzing the world in which they live and then using that analysis to change it. This would be in contrast to the traditional "banking" approach to teaching where someone else tells you about the world and then you memorize it, like someone making a deposit into a bank. Freire was also influenced by the anti-colonial writings of Frantz Fanon especially his ideas on the role of language in the psychology of the colonized. Fanon writes:

"Every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country." With this in mind, Freire developed a new form of literacy education where people don't just memorize a language embedded with the conceptual categories of the oppressor but rather do so critically, creating their own conceptual categories (of course based on a critical analysis of the world around them). Both Fanon and Freire believed that true liberation must start with education calling this process "conscientization." According to Freire, "literacy should be viewed as 'one of the major vehicles by which 'oppressed' people are able to participate in the sociohistorical transformation of their society."

Freire's ideas have had a powerful influence around the globe, but especially in Latin America, influencing liberation theology and becoming the basis for many social movements. Freire has also influenced contemporary thinking and practice of action research, participatory research, community-based research, participatory rural appraisal, participatory learning and action, and now as we present here, participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E).

The Role of PM&E in Community Development

Monitoring and evaluation are not activities outside of the community-praxis approach—they are inherently built into the action-reflection cycle. PM&E can be viewed as the reflection half of the cycle which evaluates and informs action. Monitoring and evaluation are not events that take place after the fact, but instead an on-going processes that help to improve the alliance between program partners (internal activators, communities etc.) and NGO staff (external activators, etc.) and inform involved stakeholders (funders, partner organizations, etc.) about the impact of project activities. PM&E can be used as a process to learn as an institution and improve practice in the field. For communities, this is not only a learning activity but part of the process of conscientisization. (Isn't it part of the conscien. process for the NGOs too?) Through the community-praxis approach, individuals and communities critically analyze the world around them and identify practical actions to create the world they wish to see. Critical to this approach is regular open dialog and honest reflection at each stage to determine if the underlying assumptions, strategies and actions are moving the community towards their vision.

The community-praxis approach is like peeling back the layers of an onion. Each layer you peel off is like the process of conscientization discarding another layer of false consciousness. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) is a part of this process that helps people to analyze and reflect on their actions to determine what is working and what is not. PM&E requires open dialogue between all stakeholders. If M&E reports are tied to job security and future funding—honest and genuine learning are lost as reports are fabricated to meet expectations and not based on genuine reflection and learning. PM&E has to be a two-way exchange relationship based on mutual trust which, in turn, allows for flexibility. It also requires an analysis of whether the actions are moving the community toward their vision. Each peeled of a layer is like a step in the empowerment process toward self-determination and liberation, or total empowerment. Therefore, PM&E is a tool in that process of empowerment. Because empowerment is not a tangible outcome and the process of conscientization is difficult to see - many traditional PM&E tools are not usable to measure the results of this process.

Some of our key indicators in our approach to PM&E are levels of participation, empowerment, and social capital. However, because these indicators are so intangible they are very difficult to measure using quantitative methods. Instead we advocate for qualitative participatory methods

both formal and informal. There are a multitude of participatory methods that communities, outside evaluators, and NGOs can use to measure people's perceptions of levels of social capital, etc. including mapping networks, timelines, focus groups, etc.

This, however, is a process that is to be constantly revisited as new layers of the onion come off. By using participatory M&E tools, communities may realize they have reached a new level of conscientization and that it is time to reanalyze their new reality and decide new visions to work towards. This process is cyclical.
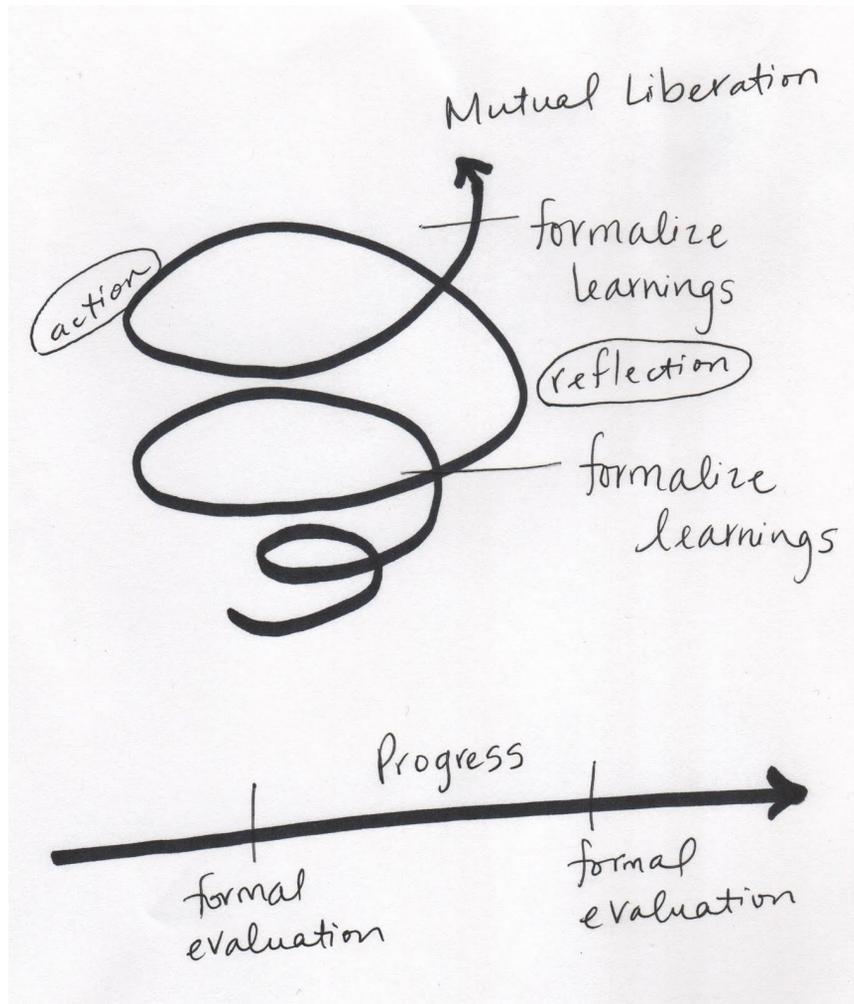

FIGURE 4: A cyclical process of action/ reflection as opposed to a linear sense of progress in M&E activities

After a series of trust building activities in a community, PM&E tools can be used to gather baseline data with which communities can better analyze their reality and with which communities can address local needs, concerns, and their hope for the future. In PM&E, local perception is more important than precision and scientific objectivity. After communities have come together to analyze that reality, create their shared vision for the future, identified obstacles, and come up with strategic directions to move them toward their vision, monitoring and evaluation activities are then built into the action planning phase. Communities and individuals themselves must determine for each specific action plan how they will determine success, who is responsible to whom, dates to hold those responsible to their timelines (although with a certain flexibility), and guidelines to determine at which level they are willing to participate in a possible outside evaluation by an NGO partner or funder. This decision can then guide the decision on where to find and apply for project funding. For example, if a community is not amenable to evaluation by an outside organization then they can proactively decide not to seek funding from that organization. Communities and organizations themselves must decide what type of funding matches their capacity and development philosophy. M&E should be done with the same level of participation as the rest of the project unless agreed upon ahead of time.

Information gathering activities are used for the purpose of helping local people to analyze their own situation and then decide how they would like to act on it. As an ally in this process external activators can act as neutral facilitators, provide expertise in certain methodologies upon the request of the community, provide access to particular resources, and be advocates for the communities. Communities do not have to reduce themselves down to transparency for funders nor for the NGO staff in this particular approach. They maintain a sense of power in their opacity. Local people can determine their own methods for data gathering whether it be participatory interview, PRA/ PLA activities, or an indigenous method of data gathering, as well as reporting formats understood by them for their use. Outside activators can use this as an opportunity to share with local people different research methods and theories so that they can use this knowledge to demystify monitoring and evaluation activities with the aim of local people 'decolonizing' these methods. These activities are not about extracting data, but rather about stimulating learning and conscientization.

Many funders and other outside evaluators like objective data to view that the predetermined outcomes have been achieved and the efficient use of resources. But many times this need to please funders or higher ups in an organization actually undermines community development processes based on relationships of trust. We recommend the adoption of a few non-negotiables in our fundraising strategy. Namely, to not fund the community development process by one large grant. Instead, we build alliances with a number of dedicated, individual, private donors and small granting organizations that trust our approach. We refuse to accept funding with time-bound targets or massive reporting requirements that hinder truly empowering and participatory processes. Many aid agencies and large NGOs require massive transparency in their project management approaches. Bureaucracy and top down approaches make them not open to dialogue with stakeholders and unable to undertake a participatory process. However if local people are genuinely empowered in this PM&E process, they can then use these tools to evaluate the performance of donor agencies and governmental institutions that impose top-down solutions on them.

At each step of the process the continuous cycle of reflection and action is repeated in order for the community, alliance of NGO partners, project team, etc to revisit their actions and determine if they are moving in the right direction or if a new action plan, visioning session, etc is needed. These reflection sessions are best facilitated using the ORID discussion method so as to not impose the facilitator's reality on the reflection of the group. The ORID methodology takes participants and facilitators through a process of questioning what reality is according to those participating. How does that reality make them feel? And how can they take that feeling and interpret why they reacted in that way and what they can do to take that and turn it into constructive further actions. This is the process of conscientization.

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